

Performing Arts Center Board Minutes 06/12/2008

SIMSBURY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER BOARD
JUNE 12, 2008

ORGANIZATIONAL MEETING

David Ryan called the organizational meeting of the Simsbury Performing Arts Center Board to order at 6:35 p.m. at the Main Meeting Room, Simsbury Town Hall. In addition to Mr. Ryan, the following members were present: Leo Collins, Janet Goman, Ken Mason, John Paddock, Greg Piecuch, and Adam Sharaf. Also in attendance were Jerry Toner, Director of Parks & Recreation, Keith Distel, Venue Manager, and Bob Hensley, liaison from the Board of Selectmen.

I. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Piecuch made a motion to elect Mr. Ryan Chairman of the Board. Mrs. Goman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Collins made a motion to elect Mr. Piecuch Vice-Chairman of the Board. Mr. Ryan seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Piecuch agreed, without objection, to assume the duties of secretary.

II. ADOPTION OF 2008 MEETING SCHEDULE

Following a discussion among the members, the Board agreed that its regular meetings would be held on the second Thursday of each month at 7:30 a.m. at Simsbury Town Hall.

III. TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION AND BOS ACTION

Mr. Ryan made reference to the task force's report which had been distributed to Board members prior to the meeting. He briefly reviewed its recommendations and the subsequent action to form the Performing Arts Center Board by the Board of Selectmen.

IV. BOARD OBJECTIVES

Mr. Ryan noted that the Board's function is to serve as a Board of Directors for the facility. Responsibilities include setting policies and annual objectives, planning future growth, motivating the management to meet the objectives and reporting annually on performance. The Board is set up as a so-called "temporary board," which means that the Board was formed by resolution and is coterminous with terms of the sitting the Board of Selectmen. At the end of the term, it is anticipated that a recommendation will be made as to whether or not the Board may be given a more permanent structure either by ordinance or under the Town Charter.

V. OVERVIEW OF 2008 MANAGEMENT – JERRY TONER

Jerry Toner gave an overview of his management of the venue for the 2008 season. Prior to 2008, management of the venue had been handled by the First Selectman's office. As a result of the change in administration, Mr. Toner agreed to assume that role for this year. He noted that an RFP was issued seeking an outside professional venue manager, to which five candidates submitted proposals. Mr. Distel and his company were selected from that group. Mr. Toner noted that the Parks & Recreation Department had limited prior involvement with the venue. He has worked extensively with Rich Sawitzke, Town Engineer, both from a production point of view, as well as in terms of establishing a set of policies and procedures.

Mr. Toner recited several priorities: resolution of any outstanding issues with the HSO, financial responsibility, professional management, capitalizing on revenue opportunities, long-term venue maintenance and expansion, and maximizing the use of the venue, both by larger acts as well as local community groups. He stated that the town is better prepared to implement these priorities now that Mr. Distel has been hired.

There was also a discussion concerning the development of a business model for the venue. A recent charitable event is illustrative of this need. Policies and procedures must address

both non-profit and for-profit events, and must take into account both the direct cost of hosting events, as well as long-term wear and tear and the need for capital improvements. With regard to the recent charitable event, the Board of Selectmen permitted the venue to be used free of charge. Mr. Toner, Mr. Sawitzke and others are in the process of trying to quantify the direct cost to the town in terms of man-hours, etc.

VI. STATUS REPORT – KEITH DISTEL

Mr. Distel gave a brief personal background, which included extensive experience in concert promotion. He noted that he was essentially a co-promoter of the Alison Krauss show in 2007.

From his perspective, the challenges and opportunities that he saw during that performance led him to the conclusion that the venue needed both a board of directors and a manager. Now that both those needs are in place, he sees room for growth.

Mr. Distel reports that he is building trust and a rapport with the HSO, and is assisting it in assuming some of the tasks and responsibilities that it had handled in years past. In his opinion, these are prerequisites before the HSO would commit to a long-term contract. One thing to explore would be the formation of a 501(c)(3) akin to the Friends of the Simsbury Library which, as opposed to the municipal government, may be eligible for state and federal grants.

Scheduling, both for 2008 and 2009, was discussed. Since being hired, Mr. Distel has made contact with various promoters and organizations including the HSO, Premier Concerts, Live Nation, the Connecticut Theater Festival, Sound Off Summer Music Festival, and a number of community organizations. Given the recent transition and the lateness of the calendar, the outlook for a major concert in addition to the TMMF is not favorable, though not out of the question. It is hoped that Mr. Distel's work will begin to payoff in the 2009 season.

Mr. Distel discussed his goal of achieving an increased level of comfort between the HSO and other major promoters that would allow an increased program schedule. One aim would be to have

the HSO commit to its dates by the previous August, thereby giving the town more time in attracting other entertainment. In return, however, Mr. Distel believes the facility needs some action in the short term that will illustrate a long-term commitment to the success of the venue. One idea is a permanent box office. Currently, the HSO is operating out of a temporary trailer. In addition, the venue needs increased efficiency in order to reduce operating costs. For example, annual rental of light towers increases travel and labor charges. Investment in facility-owned light towers would save those expenses. Mr. Ryan noted that the town currently has a special revenue fund for the venue, which has approximately \$70,000.00 in it.

VII. TOUR OF THE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

The Board recessed at 7:42 p.m. and reconvened shortly thereafter at the Performing Arts Center for a tour of the facility.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Ryan moved to adjourn at approximately 8:30 p.m. Mr. Collins seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Gregory W. Piecuch